



Presidential Primary Background Paper

Washington State is the second most populous state in the Western United States. The office of the President is critical to the citizens of this state. Many issues including the Hanford Nuclear Waste Repository, the Snake and Columbia River Dams, International Trade, the Bonneville Power Administration, National Forests, and the military installations are all important to Washington's future.

Total federal spending in Washington State reached \$6.1 billion, for Fiscal Year 2006.

The presidential nominating process is extremely important for the State of Washington by bringing presidential candidates to Washington State to take positions on critical issues facing this state's future, to interact with Washington voters, and to allow our citizens to participate in nominating candidates for the country's highest office.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the two processes for nominating candidates for President of the United States. These two processes are (1) presidential primaries and (2) political party caucuses.

Presidential Primaries and Caucuses

In states that hold a presidential primary, qualified voters are allowed to select a major party ballot and vote for one candidate on that ballot. In states that require party registration, qualified voters are automatically issued the corresponding party ballot. 42 states plan to conduct a presidential primary in 2008.

Typically, voters must sign an oath declaring an affiliation with one political party before voting. A list of voters with their political affiliation is recorded by the state and provided to the political parties.

Thus, the presidential primary is generally accessible to all voters, but voters must make public declarations of affiliation with a party in order to participate.

Some states select delegates to the national conventions based upon the caucus system. In the caucus system, precinct level meetings are conducted in schools, churches, neighborhoods and private homes at which voters wishing to participate may attend.

Upon arriving at a caucus, voters sign an oath declaring an affiliation with that political party and participate in discussions on the candidates and the party platform. During the course of the

meeting, delegates are selected to support designated candidates at county and state conventions. Delegates to the national convention are selected later at the state party convention.

It is also possible for a political party to use the results of both caucuses and a presidential primary to allocate delegates for the national convention. For example, a party may decide to allocate half of the delegates based on the results of the caucuses, and half of the delegates based on the results of a presidential primary.

History of Delegate Selection in Washington State

Prior to 1988, political parties in Washington State used the caucus system to select delegates for the national conventions.

In 1988, the caucus system resulted in Pat Robertson being selected as Washington's Republican nominee for President. Political polls indicated that Pat Robertson would not have been the choice of Republican voters in the state, most of whom would have selected a more moderate candidate.

Frustrated with this outcome, a citizen sponsored Initiative to the Legislature generated over 200,000 signatures to support a presidential primary. Supporters believed that a presidential primary would be less restrictive and less discriminatory.

The 1989 Legislature adopted the citizen initiative without change, thereby providing for a presidential primary in the State of Washington.

Under Washington's presidential primary law, the political parties provide the oath that voters must sign. The law also requires that a list of voters who participated in each party's primary be provided to the parties.

A default date for the presidential primary is also set in statute for the 4th Tuesday in May. A nine member committee, including four Democrats, four Republicans, and the Secretary of State, is authorized to change this date upon a vote of six members.

In prior presidential primaries, voters selected from a Republican, Democratic, or unaffiliated ballot.

Although the Legislature authorized a presidential primary, under the First Amendment, political parties retain the decision of whether to use the results of the primary to select their delegates.

History of Presidential Primary in Washington State

In 1992, Washington State held its first presidential primary. In that year, the Republicans used 100% of the primary results to select their delegates to the national convention.

In 1996, the Republicans designated 50% of delegates based on primary results. In 2000, 33% of Republican delegates were allocated based on primary results. In both 1996 and 2000, Republicans used the caucus system to apportion the remaining delegates.

State Democrats have never used primary results when deciding on delegates to the Democratic National Convention and have relied solely on the caucus system.

The last time a presidential primary was held was in 2000. 1.3 million voters participated in the presidential primary while only approximately 60,000 attended the party caucuses.

The Legislature held a special session in December 2003 to cancel the 2004 presidential primary. The Democrats had once again decided not to use primary results for delegate selection, and it was assumed the Republicans would nominate incumbent President George W. Bush. Thus, the 2004 Presidential Primary was viewed as a meaningless exercise.

Date of the Presidential Primary in Washington State

Although the statute establishes a date for the presidential primary of the 4th Tuesday in May, this date has never been used for a primary in Washington State. Previous presidential primaries were held on:

- May 19, 1992
- March 26, 1996
- February 29, 2000

The 2004 Presidential Primary was cancelled.

Anticipating the 2008 Presidential Primary, Secretary of State Sam Reed convened the Committee of Nine on March 23, 2007. At that meeting, the four Republicans and the Secretary of State supported moving the presidential primary to February 5, 2008. The four Democrats supported March 18, 2008.

Failing to reach six votes for either date, the meeting was adjourned to a later date to allow the political parties to make final decisions about delegate selection plans. Secretary Reed announced his intention to reconvene the group in May 2007 to again consider changing the date. Most likely dates to consider include: February 5, February 12, or February 19.

The members of the 2008 Committee of Nine are:

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| ▪ Sam Reed | Secretary of State |
| ▪ Lisa Brown | Senate Majority Leader |
| ▪ Mike Hewitt | Senate Minority Leader |
| ▪ Frank Chopp | House of Representatives Speaker |
| ▪ Richard DeBolt | House of Representatives Minority Leader |
| ▪ Luke Esser | Washington State Republican Party Chair |
| ▪ Olga Miller | Washington State Republican Party Vice-Chair |
| ▪ Dwight Pelz | Washington State Democratic Central Committee Chair |
| ▪ Eileen Macoll | Washington State Democratic Central Committee Vice-Chair |

2008 Primaries and Caucuses in other States

The National Association of Secretaries of State is maintaining a list of dates already selected by various states for primaries and caucuses. This list may be accessed at:

<http://www.nass.org/releases/2008%20Presidential%20Primaries%20Calendar.pdf>

Both major national parties have declared that primaries and caucuses may not be held prior to February 5, 2008. However, the Democratic National Committee has provided exceptions for Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, and South Carolina. A handful of other states plan to hold primaries or caucuses prior to February 5, 2008 but risk being penalized by the parties.

As of April 13, 2008, twenty-three states have scheduled or are likely to schedule primaries or caucuses on February 5, 2008. These include large and delegate rich states such as California, Illinois, New York, and Texas.

Thus, it now appears possible that by February 5, 2008, the presidential nominees will have been narrowed down or possibly decided.

2007 Legislation

The unaffiliated ballot is for voters who do not wish to affiliate with either major political party. The Secretary of State introduced legislation during the 2007 legislative session to eliminate the unaffiliated ballot because the political parties have never acknowledged the votes cast on the unaffiliated ballot. Consequently, the ballot misleads voters into believing that their ballots will be considered. [HB 1526](#) has passed the Legislature and is expected to be signed by the Governor. Under this legislation, voters will choose between a Democratic and Republican ballot.

[HB 2379](#) was introduced to cancel the 2008 Presidential Primary. The bill was heard on March 15, 2007 by the House Appropriations Committee. Secretary of State Sam Reed and approximately one dozen voters and advocacy groups presented strong testimony against the bill at the hearing and the bill subsequently died.

The Governor, Senate, and House have presented budgets that include \$9.7 million for the 2008 Presidential Primary and supporting voters' pamphlet.

Status of Washington State Political Party Decisions for 2008 Delegate Selection

Even though party leaders have suggested publicly that primary results may not affect delegate selection, the debate is active and strong within both political parties. Strong advocates exist in both parties for a meaningful presidential primary. Thus, final decisions have not been made in either party regarding delegate selection.

The State Democratic Central Committee plans to vote on its delegate selection plan at a public meeting on April 28, 2007. The meeting will take place at 1:30 p.m. at Western Washington University. The media and members of the public may attend. Their Rules Committee will recommend that caucuses be used to select delegates.

The State Republican Party will address this issue at its meeting in Yakima on June 2, 2007.

The Secretary of State, members of the public, groups such as the League of Women Voters and the Washington Protection Advocacy System, and members of the press continue to advocate that the will of the people be reflected in delegate selection.

Policy Reasons supporting a Presidential Primary

Secretary of State Sam Reed is a strong proponent of the presidential primary.

Voter Participation is Stronger. Voter participation in a presidential primary is much stronger than the caucus system. 1.3 million voters participated in the 2000 presidential primary, compared with an estimated 60,000 voters who attended caucuses.

Exclusionary and Discriminatory Effects are Eliminated. If a presidential primary is held, roughly 90% of voters will receive ballots in the mail. The remaining 10% can vote ballots at an accessible poll site. Conversely, any voter may be disenfranchised from participating in the caucus system, including those who are:

- overseas or out of state military voters and other citizens;
- on vacation;
- working at caucus times;
- elderly, sick, or hospitalized;
- limited in terms of language skills;
- hearing impaired; or
- disabled.

A Primary Brings Candidates to Washington. A presidential primary forces candidates to study and take positions on issues important to Washington's future. The primary brings candidates to the state and engages voters. In caucus states, candidates may visit, but do so primarily to meet with party insiders. In a primary state, candidates are more accessible to all voters and the state is energized with the excitement of participating in presidential candidate selection.

2008 Features a Highly Competitive Presidential Nomination Process. When an incumbent president or vice-president is running, the nomination process is less interesting. 1952 was the last year in which no incumbent President or Vice-President was a candidate. In 2008, both political parties have wide open, robust campaigns with numerous viable candidates. The conditions have never been more ripe for engaging all Washington voters in the nomination process.

Average Voter heard. The reality is that only very active party insiders attend and participate in the caucus system. The vast majority of voters who claim affiliation with a political party either cannot or choose not to attend. Thus, decisions are made by a small circle of political party insiders.

Presidential Primary benefits Washington State regardless of Delegate Selection

Even if a political party chooses to disregard the primary in terms of delegate selection, the presidential primary still has significant value to the State of Washington.

A primary does bring candidates to the state and forces them to take positions on significant issues. For example, Governor Gregoire has suggested that each candidate should be forced to take a position on the future of the Hanford Nuclear Waste Repository. In 2000, when the Republicans allocated 1/3 of the Washington delegates based on the presidential primary and the Democrats ignored the results entirely, George Bush took important positions on the future of the Snake River Dams on one of his visits to Washington State. John McCain spoke forcefully on the importance of Washington's role in international trade when he campaigned in Washington.

California will be holding its primary on February 5, 2008, and Oregon is considering February 5. All of the candidates will be making a trip west and will include Washington, the second largest state in the west, on the campaign trail if Washington is also conducting its presidential primary on February 5, 2008.

Conclusion

The presidential nominating process is critically important for the future of the State of Washington and its citizens. Presidential candidates take positions on crucial issues facing this state's future and interact with Washington voters. Our citizens deserve to participate in nominating candidates for the country's highest office.